



The role of social media on the purchase intention of customers with IR-MCI numbers (Case of study: Iranian tea)

Shayan Basir¹, Mohammad Reza Azadehdel^{1}, Maryam Ooshaksaraei²*

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Abstract

The current research has been done with the aim of studying the effect of social media on customers' brand attitude and purchase intention. This article is based on a part of the collected data of the research project. This research is an applied research in which the customers with IR-MCI numbers (Hamrahe Aval) and the users of relevant media services who were interested in using domestic products such as tea brands were selected as the statistical population. In this regard from the data of 227 of the mentioned customers they were selected as the sample of the research with IR-MCI numbers (Hamrahe Aval). The required data were collected through a questionnaire tool, whose content validity and reliability were also confirmed by emphasizing internal consistency through Cronbach's alpha, and were analyzed using SPSS 24 and Smart PLS. The findings indicate the confirmation of the significant effect of marketing through social media on purchase intention of domestic products like Iranian tea. Also, it confirms, the effect of brand attitude on the purchase intention. Finally, the result affirms the role of Iranian brand attitude in the relationship between marketing through social media on the customers purchase intention.

Keywords: Brand attitude, Purchase intention, Social media, Tea.

Introduction

In today's world, where the economic power determines the position of the countries in the international arena, the production of agricultural products that meet the basic and essential needs of humans is of special importance, so that even advanced countries try to produce food, regardless of some accepted principles of the economy, provide the needs of their society by supporting

domestic producers so that in the event of danger, people can have peace of mind about providing their minimum livelihood (Abbasi Saremi, 2019). Among the agricultural products in Iran, tea is one of the important, valuable and strategic products, which, while having a long history, plays a major role in creating employment in the agricultural and industrial sectors, especially in the northern regions of the country. Meanwhile, the

¹ PhD Student, Department of Business Administration, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran

² Department of Public Administration, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran, reza_azadehdel@yahoo.com

³ Department of Industrial Management, Rasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran

country's tea industry provides only half of domestic needs and consumption, and the rest is imported. With the entry of foreign products into the domestic market, and due to the importance and special position of tea in the consumption basket of Iranian families, the competition between domestic and foreign products has increased, and different brands of this product in line with increasing sales performance have also put extensive advertising on the agenda, beyond the importance of quality and improving other competitive advantages. On the other hand, in the last decade, we have seen the explosion of various communication tools used by companies to sell products to customers. Companies use advertising and promotion programs to create a favorable mental image. The reason why companies use multiple communications is that each of these tools play different roles and have different effects on each customer (Bagharian, 2017). One of these tools is social media and doing digital marketing activities through websites and social media (Matak Aji ET AL., 2020). Social networks have created a relationship management with a social customer, which is not only a tool for having information and deep knowledge of customers, but has provided the possibility of increasing the participation of customers in the organizational life and social networks. Since social networks are very strong and effective basis for interaction between a large numbers of people, they have turned into a very efficient platform for buying and selling goods and services. In fact, in business based on social networks, groups that have common interests, similarities, and intimacy will

receive informational and emotional support, which will lead to buying and selling or facilitating this process (Amirian Malabashi, 2017). Studying and investigating the factors that influence the consumer's purchase intention and examining the impact of each of these factors on the customer's purchase intentions is of particular importance, because by knowing the customer's purchase intention, it is possible to predict his/her behavior, and only in this way organizations will be able to provide a product that is more in line with the consumers' needs and wants, or in other words, provide a product that is "the result of factors affecting consumers' buying behavior" and provide their maximum satisfaction (Safarzadeh et al., 2011). However, previous studies have focused on the relationship between marketing communication and brand equity only by relying on traditional marketing communication tools. The emergence of social media has introduced a new channel in marketing communications. Organizations and companies have turned to using these media to keep in touch with their audiences and customers. These media are a quick way to get people's opinions. Companies use social media to advertise their products and inform their services and activities, they find new customers, they are their advisors and companions in the virtual space, and they take ideas and suggestions from customers and transfer them to the organization's management team. They use these sites to recruit and hire human resources and finally try to develop the culture of their company or organization in their target society. The consumers purchase intention has also



undergone extensive changes using social networks. In this environment, customers have access to a kind of knowledge and social experience that supports them in better understanding of the purchase goals and making a more correct and informed purchase decision. In the online world, a customer's decision to buy a product or service is largely influenced by his friends, family, and colleagues. And for this reason, social networks are known as one of the best places to do business (Saeednia & Ghorbanzade, 2017). Using these communication tools is not a simple activity but requires a new way of thinking (Aghili & Qasemzadeh Iraqi, 2015). The media can effectively strengthen the existence of currents of thought and, if necessary, change them (Droudi, 2013). The functions of social media are different in each society. In Iran, the majority of social media contacts are people between 18 and 35 years old, most of whom have higher education. Therefore, policy makers and senior managers should promote a space for business that fits the conditions of the people in the society, which is suitable for the mentioned audience. Today, media experts talk about the power of the audience (users and consumers) in the world of message explosion. They are of the opinion that the audience can see whatever they want and they can easily remove the communication. On the other hand, mass communication media also play a very important role in creating and manipulating the values, attitudes and tendencies of consumers and customers in society. Media messages can create and promote new values or transform the old values. According to

many, the role of social media in the expansion of this socio-cultural-economic phenomenon is very high (Moghadas & Kalate Seifari, 2017), in such a way that today the ideology related to consumerism can be seen in advertisements and commercial messages for goods and services. It can be said that the role of mass and social media in the expansion of consumerism is nothing less than industrialization and the production of mass goods, and today the media with their persuasive messages have become one of the tools of the capitalist economic system to find satisfied and loyal customers for products. Therefore, in today's world, one of the ways for customers to recognize brands and decide to buy them is to introduce and show them in different media. Choosing the right media, considering the breadth and diversity of mass and especially social media, is very important for business owners and can help them in choosing customers. Considering the importance of the topic, this research tries to investigate the role of social media on the customers' purchase intention of Iranian tea.

Theoretical framework and development of research hypotheses

Marketing through social media and purchase intention

Social media has now become a trend in marketing communications. According to Bernarto et al. (2022), social media is a group of Internet-based applications that are based on the ideological framework and Web 2.0 technology and enable the exchange of information content from Internet users. According to Harrigan et al (2021); Haudi et

al. (2022) purchase intention is an opportunity for consumers to plan to buy a specific product at a certain time and certain factors are the main factors of purchase behavior. Social media marketing helps marketers to share good information about the sold products with the store (Bernarto et al. (2022); Harrigan et al (2021); Haudi et al. (2022). Through social networks, customers can simply and easily get complete information about the product they are interested to buy. Increasing the consumer's intention to be active on social media can increase their intention to buy, and this positive effect can last for at least a few weeks. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the research was formed as follows:

-H₁: Marketing through social media has an effect on customers' purchase intention.

Marketing through social media and brand attitude

Attitude, as an effective factor in people's belief, plays an important role in decision making. Because the decision to perform a behavior depends on a person's overall evaluation of a specific behavior and his personal attitude (Nam e al., 2017). Marketers strive to gain a better understanding of customers' attitudes and emotions about products, services, and distribution systems, as well as their competitors' products, services, and distribution systems.

Attitudinal structures are useful tools for understanding the observable behavior of buyers and consumers in the market (Khairi & Jarjarzadeh, 2013). In general, research shows that social media and traditional media have a significant impact on consumers'

attitudes towards the company's brand name [16]. Therefore, the second hypothesis was formed as:

-H₂: Marketing through social media has an effect on customers' brand attitude.

Brand attitude and willingness to buy

Behavioral intention to purchase is a psychological variable, which acts as an intervening variable between attitude and actual behavior. Regarding the relationship between attitude and behavior, attitude has a positive effect on purchase intention (Farhangi et al., 2014). Aliaei and Aminian (2015) also investigated the effect of customer attitude on purchase intention. Their modeling results showed that brand attitude has a significant effect on purchase intention. In another research, Kiran and Shanmugam (2016) tried to investigate the influencing factors on the consumer's attitude towards the intention to buy a car among 202 Indian customers. The findings of their research show that the five factors of brand awareness, social media type, social media information, website and social media effectiveness had a significant impact on consumer attitudes and driving them to purchase. Therefore, the third and fourth hypotheses of the research were formed as:

-H₃: Brand attitude has an effect on customers' purchase intention.

-H₄: Brand attitude plays a mediating role in the relationship between social media marketing and customers' purchase intention.

Methodology

The current research is applied in terms of purpose and is classified as a descriptive-



survey research. The statistical population of this research consists of customers with IR-MCI numbers (Hamrahe Aval) who are the users of relevant media services and were interested in using domestic tea brand. In order to estimate and determine the sample size, Cochran's formula was used, in this way, first, 35 questionnaires was distributed and the variance of the initial sample was calculated, and then they were inserted into Cochran's formula and the sample size was estimated to be 258. However, in order to achieve the specified minimum sample size, with a 10% increase, 285 questionnaires were distributed among companies, of which 277 questionnaires were identified as suitable for analysis, and were analyzed. The researcher has chosen the available non-probability random sampling method. In this way, first, the share of each chain store in the society is determined according to the number and extent of its branches in the city, then it is estimated according to the size of the sample, based on the share of each branch in the total sample. The sample of each chain store was

determined, then questionnaires were distributed among the customers of these stores using the available non-probability random sampling method. The questionnaire is a standard questionnaire with questions related to marketing through social media (3 questions) taken from the studies of Amini and Zakiri (2022), questions related to brand attitude taken from the studies of Machi et al. (2022), and questions related to purchase intention (6 questions) is taken from the studies of Cahyanaputra et al. (2022), which were measured through a five-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree). The reliability and validity criteria of the tool include: Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR) and convergent validity (AVE) are presented in table (1), the value of alpha and CR of 0.7 indicates acceptable reliability, and the value of AVE= 0.5 indicates sufficient convergent validity. As can be seen, according to table (1), the validity and reliability of the tool was at an optimal level.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity

Variables	N of questions	Alfa	CR	AVE
Marketing through social media	3	0.921	0.942	0.764
Purchase Intention	6	0.895	0.921	0.662
Brand attitude	5	0.751	0.857	0.667

Research findings

Descriptive and inferential statistics of collected data were presented by using SPSS24 and Smart PLS 3 software. In the descriptive statistics, the distribution of the

statistical sample was presented in terms of demographic variables such as (gender, age, educational status, marital status and monthly income) (Table 2) and the average, standard deviation, variance and frequency of the dimensions of independent and dependent

variables (Table 3) And in inferential statistics, research hypotheses were tested using path analysis (Table 5).

Table 2. Characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequently	Percentage
Gender		
○ male	205	74
○ female	72	26
Age		
○ 18 to 25	6	2.2
○ 26 to 35	170	61.4
○ 36 to 45	96	34.7
○ 46 to 55	5	1.8
○ 55 and above	-	-
Marital status		
○ Single	147	53.1
○ Married	130	46.9
Educational status		
○ Diploma	9	3.2
○ Associate	8	2.9
○ Bachelor's degree	86	3.1
○ Master's degree	148	53.4
○ Ph.D	26	9.4
Monthly income		
○ Less than 5 million	130	46.9
○ 5 to 8 million	47	17
○ 8 to 12 million	76	27.4
○ More than 12 million	24	8.7

Table 3. Description of Research Variables

Variables	N	Ave	SE	Var
Marketing through social media	277	3.846	0.702	0.493
Brand attitude	277	4.312	0.648	0.420
Purchase Intention	277	4.181	0.590	0.348

As can be seen, the lowest average is related to the variable of marketing through social media and the highest average is related to the variable of intention to purchase Iranian tea.

Analysis of Hypotheses

Before testing the research hypothesis, in order to ensure the accuracy of the questions related to the research variables, a



confirmatory factor analysis was performed, and the results of measuring the factor loadings showed that all the mentioned questions measure their respective variables with a high percentage.

Fit of the research model

In order to fit the research model, R^2 and GOF criteria, which are used in partial least squares method, were used. The value of R^2 for the brand attitude variable was obtained (0.647) and (0.795) for the intention to purchase. This means that 65% of the

changes in the brand attitude can be explained by the marketing variable through social media, and 80% of the changes in the purchase intention can be explained by the two variables of marketing through social media and brand attitude. Three criteria values of 0.19 (weak), 0.32 (moderate) and 0.67 (strong) have been introduced for R^2 , and based on the findings, it can be concluded that the model has relatively good predictive ability. But for higher reliability, GOF was also calculated. Based on this, the values obtained for both criteria are presented in table (4):

Table 4. Fit of the Research Model

Variables	R^2	Communality	GOF
Marketing through social media	---	0.608	$Gof = \sqrt{Communality \times R^2}$ GOF= 0.590
Brand attitude	0.647	0.331	
Purchase Intention	0.795	0.511	
Average	0.721	0.483	

Obtaining a value of 0.590 confirms the good fit of the research models.

Table 5. Results of Research hypotheses

Hypothesis	Direct effect	T-Value	Indirect Effect	Total effect	Sig	Result
Social Media > Purchase Intention	0.660	15.87	0.217	0.877	Sig<0.01	Accepted
Social Media > Brand Attitude	0.804	36.87	-	0.804	Sig<0.01	Accepted
Brand Attitude > Purchase Intention	0.269	5.27	-	0.269	Sig<0.01	Accepted

H₁: the value of t-statistic is equal to 15.87 and is greater than 1.96. As a result, the effect of marketing through social media on the customers purchase intention of Iranian tea is accepted with at least 99% confidence. The coefficient of the standard path between the two variables is equal to 0.660, which shows

the 66% positive effect of the variable of marketing through social media on the customers purchase intention. Comparing to the other researches results, it can be said that this finding of the current research is consistent with the previous findings of Hajli and Sims (2015), Kiran and Shanmugam

(2016), Bernarto and Purwanto (2022); Harrigan et al. (2021); and Haudi et al (2022). H₂: the value of t-statistic is equal to 36.87 and is greater than 1.96. As a result, the effect of marketing through social media on the attitude of customers was accepted with at least 99% confidence. Also, the coefficient of the standard path between the two variables is equal to 0.804, which shows the 80% positive impact of the variable of marketing through social media on the attitude of customers. Comparing to the other researches results, it can be said that this finding of the current research is consistent with the previous findings of Abzari et al (2013).

H₃: the value of t-statistic is equal to 5.27 and it is greater than 1.96. As a result, the effect of brand attitude on customers' purchase intention was accepted with at least 99% confidence. Also, the coefficient of the standard path between the two variables is equal to 0.269, which shows the 27% positive effect of the brand attitude on the customers' purchase intention. Comparing to the other researches results, it can be said that this finding of the current research is consistent with the previous findings of Farhani et al (2014), Aliai and Aminian (2015), Kiran and Shanmugam (2016).

H₄: In order to investigate the mediating effect, three paths should be investigated: 1: Path between independent and dependent variable 2: Path between independent variable and mediator and 3: Path between mediator and dependent variable. If the direct path between the mentioned variables are significant, then the mediating effect of the mediating variable can be calculated by calculating the indirect effect. Table (5)

shows the results of the above paths for the mediating role of brand attitude. Since all three paths mentioned in the table are confirmed, the mediating effect of brand attitude in the relationship between marketing through social media and customers' purchase intention was confirmed. As a result, the fourth hypothesis is accepted. As can be seen in table (5), the mediating effect or indirect effect was equal to 0.217.

Conclusions and Ssuggestions

In recent years, the use of media (traditional or modern) has a great opportunity to influence the attitude and desire of customers and clients. Especially advertising and marketing through social media is a great and profitable opportunity for telecommunication systems. In this regard, IR-MCI Hamrahe Aval company has been able to allocate a suitable share with its powerful infrastructure and facilities. In this digital age, social media is no longer used only for communication but is considered an effective tool in business. Because the impact of social media on marketing has been great and has brought new opportunities and challenges to brands. Most consumers around the world now have the power of advertising and shopping in their pockets on a daily basis. Social media enables companies and consumers to communicate and interact across multiple platforms, leading to an increased need for brands to respond quickly and effectively to consumer inquiries. On the other hand, tea is a product whose product life cycle never decreases, especially for the Iranian society, which attaches much more importance to it.



This is despite the fact that during the past years, the situation became such that many tea gardens were turned into citrus gardens or villas, and many others were left uncared. So, a large percentage of the tea available in the market is foreign and it is natural for different companies to import it and advertise it to introduce their product. In this regard, they can attract more customers and promote their sales performance by studying and changing consumer behavior and relying on social media, which today is considered a more effective tool for marketing and brand recognition, through informative advertisements based on providing information about high-quality and competitive packaging.

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